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TO RUIN IS NOT TO REFORM. L. S. S. S. S.

[ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION OF ST. LOUIS.]

Toward the close of last century, when Herschel had discovered the great planet Uranus on its silent course across the rigid constellations of fixed stars in infinite space, the astronomers began to calculate the orbit on which the planet ought to move, in concordance with the immutable laws which rule the starry heavens.

But, somehow or other, the planet did not submit to the astronomers' decision. The laws from which they had deduced their prediction were irrefragable; the calculations were without a flaw; and still the planet would not move in the right way. What could there be in Uranus to account for these perturbations? Why did it stubbornly refuse to swing the circle assigned to it? What disturbing element was there in that dimly-lighted sphere, that it should wander from the right path?

In course of time the answer to these questions was found: There was nothing wrong about the planet. There was no disturbing element in it at all. It was not responsible for the perturbations of its course.

The source of the trouble became evident. Neptune had been discovered, in measureless distance beyond the known planets. Its attraction had moved Uranus out of its calculated orbit; it was the reason why Uranus had defied all calculation, and had taken an irregular, unreasonable, and objectionable course; yet it was separated from the unruly planet by inconceivable space.

In a similar way, among the stars on the firmament of political and municipal institutions, the wise men of the time have discovered that education has gone astray from

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its orbit. They denounce it; they have not yet calculated in what orbit it ought to run,—for on that question not two of them seem to agree,—but they know that it should move differently from what it does. They have discovered that education has moved out of its orbit, and they think of pulling it to pieces in order to find in its wheels, and pivots, and springs, the disturbing element.

May it be proper to suggest that the cause disturbing education may lie beyond education altogether, and not in it; that there may be some general cause, as powerful in the political world as gravitation in the physical, which influences the life of our time, and which has its effect on the course of education as well as on other political institutions.

Public schools are not the only institutions held up in “keen sun-light of publicity.” They share this fate in common with public affairs and public men in general. But the blows which public opinion aims at public institutions are intended rather to test the strength and quality of their metal, by its ring, than to ruin and destroy them. Public opinion knows full well the difference between ruin and reform.

Is not the cause of many of these attacks, and of the prevailing dissatisfaction, rather found in the general despondency than in the working of the schools themselves? But three years ago unlimited praise was showered upon them; to-day they have had opportunities to become accustomed to unmeasured censure. Why this should be so is difficult to say. The schools are managed to-day by public bodies as good as, or better than, those which controlled them then; they are based on the same plan; their course of study is unaltered; they are taught by the same teachers. What D’Alembert said of princes seems to apply to public favor and public opinion: “They are like children; they are quickly enraptured, and forget quickly.”

Depression in commerce and a stringent state of financial affairs have followed upon a terrible war, which, while it

lasted, seemed rather to quicken commercial life than to impede it. Imaginary values were created, which are melting in the milder air of a new era. Municipal debts, contracted during the heyday of wild speculation, when million after million was poured into parks, court-houses, and railroads, are to be paid for now ; and our cities are displeased at the discovery that contracting debts is more enjoyable than paying them.

These and many other causes have led to a state of general displeasure, when hardly any public institution finds favor with the people.

Nor is this feeling of despondency confined to our part of the world. With the thousand means of intercourse which modern invention and enterprise have put like a girdle round the world, a common consciousness of the human race has sprung up, which is troubled in general by the afflictions sustained by humanity in any part of the globe. The whole race is bound together by ties of sympathy. A common pulsation throbs through the arteries of all nations, making the heart of the world beat higher in bright times, and moving every soul to vague sadness in national calamity. Events thousands of miles away,—the plagues of Asia, the wars of Europe, the sufferings of England's workmen,—are clouds which obscure the cheerfulness of all the civilized world.

States of public consciousness spread from one mind to another ; they sweep over the earth more rapidly than the winds of heaven. A panic, commercial or social, travels more quickly than the plague. Thus our nation, too, is still in the outer shadow of the eclipse of the sun of prosperity, whose central darkness covers with deep gloom at present the manufacturing cities of England. But it seems that we have past the worst, and that the mists are lifting from the land, and with prosperity confidence in well-tried public institutions will return.

What has not been attacked during this period of public de-

spondency? Everything and everybody has been assailed,—from president to postmaster, from congress to city council; from presidential election to the burned garments of private Hynes. Serious newspapers, venerable magazines, have inaugurated an era of political conundrums, such as, “Are We a Nation?” “Are Republican Institutions a Failure?” The question, “Is Public Education a Failure?” is a logical sequence of these inquiries. The affirmation of the one is the affirmation of the other. If republican institutions are a failure, then public education is a failure. If public education cannot be maintained, then republican institutions are doomed to become the prey of demagogues and politicians, and their downfall is but a question of time.

“Are republican institutions a failure?” Who asks this question? The experiment of a change need not be tried; it is well illustrated by the monarchical governments of Europe, where each nation must guard against the rest; where the strength of one is a menace to the other; where the youth of the land waste years of their lives in barrack and camp; where poverty lies in the dust, and privilege and wealth hold sway over individual freedom. “Are republican institutions a failure?” they ask, as if the faults which prompt the question were not as likely to grow in a monarchy as in a republic.

“Is public education a failure?” is an inquiry prompted by the same spirit. Imagine for a moment that public schools be abolished, or so modified as to give to the poor but a pittance of an education. Then the children of the wealthy, who can pay for it, will receive their instruction by private tuition. There will no longer be a place where the youth of all classes of society meet and become acquainted with each other, and learn to see the human being in the son of the laborer as well as in the child of the banker. This, indeed, would be the beginning of the caste system, which may flourish in Europe, but which is incompatible with free institutions. To those who ask the question,



“Are republican institutions a failure?” a system of public education, such as this nation has reared, does not seem a success. No! Wherever the spirit of caste reiterates its mediæval creed, we find it of necessity inimical to public education.

Prince Metternich, during the early part of this century the absolute and all-powerful prime minister of Austria, was sitting with some of his noble guests on the terrace of his castle of Johannisberg. Down in the deep valley before them flowed the Rhine, while on the vine-clad hills of the opposite banks peasants, men and women, were busy in gathering the ripened grapes. “Gentlemen,” said Metternich, “look at this scene. It is my ideal of the State. Down there, the people working and laboring in the fields; here, looking down upon them, wealth and noblesse, and an impassable gulf between the two.”

This is not the opinion of the American people; there is no hesitation in answering that question; there is no distinction of party in this matter. Let them ask a thousand times, “Is public education a failure?” and national tradition and wisdom will answer: “It is not a failure; it shall not be. We do not want the youth of the land to grow up, hedged in and separated from each other by caste prejudice. We do not want to have the poor educated in free schools where naught is taught but the three R’s, while the rich have the advantage of the education of the academy. There shall be no castes in our country.”

In the life of our nation, the rich and educated shall not stand on one side and the poor and ignorant on the other, with an impassable gulf between them. No caste systems with us. No child shall be stunted in his education by the State, and thus be predestined to the lowest walks of life. His education shall be good enough not to debar him from any position to which his efforts and talents assign him. There may be reasonable difference of opinion about the allowable extent of school instruction; but about the right

of the State to maintain a system of popular education there can be no question. To hear this right discussed and questioned as a matter of legal speculation, is to be reminded of Schiller's famous distich :

“Ever since I can think, I've used my nose for smelling;  
Now, how can I prove that such is my legal right?”

The State, like the individual, has the duty of self-preservation. A republican democracy cannot exist together with ignorance and caste-rule. Popular education is the only remedy for both ; and, therefore, it is necessary for the political existence of the country.

In the days of old, when the client kings of the Eternal City were too loud and bitter in their contentions and cavils, the real sovereign, Rome, quietly gave her judgment, and all clamor ceased at once. “Rome has spoken — the matter is at an end,” stopped the loudest strife. So, to-day, with us there is a power which keeps aloof from the war of fiery partisans on either side, namely, the great mass of the people, who reserve to themselves the supreme judgment to decide affairs of public concern. We all remember the clamorous political issues of last summer and fall. But the people spoke, and the matter is at an end.

To my mind, nothing is more evident than the position of the American people in regard to education. When its voice shall be heard, it will ring into the ears of its servants in council and school-room : “Be ye careful house-keepers. In school affairs, use your judgment, but remember that brains are more valuable than bricks ; decide at your pleasure what studies shall be taught, and what not ; whether you can have school-houses built of stone or of logs ; what books shall be used, and what books shall be discarded. But take care that out of these minor issues no harm shall arise to the cause of popular education.”

When once the voice of the people have settled this question, we shall no longer have to deal with a class of Hotspurs,



who are ever ready to join the hue and cry raised by anybody against anything; who first hunt a suffering cause to death, and then ask what it was all for; who stab first, and explain afterward that it was all a mistake, and done with the best intentions in the world.

Nor do I believe that much is gained from sweeping criticism on schools and education, written with a profound ignorance of the facts, — criticism which contains enough general truth to entrap the unwary sympathies of the reader, and just enough of ignorance, error, and misstatement to make the whole a pernicious perversion.

—“And he said, likewise,  
That a lie which is half a truth is ever the blackest of lies;  
That a lie which is all a lie may be met and fought with outright,  
But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight.”

There is an abundance of counsel, but it will be necessary to sift. People are never more liberal in giving than when they give advice. When ancient Rome was in danger, and the fierce Gauls had scaled the walls of the Capitol, the geese kept there began to cackle fearfully, and awakening the guard, they saved the State. Thus, whenever anything is wrong nowadays, every goose deems it his duty to cackle, thinking to help in saving the country.

During the past year, school affairs have been discussed abundantly in the public prints throughout the land. Many of these articles contained valuable hints; others, if they were based on observation and facts, would prove an alarming state of the practical instruction in the schools, and demand immediate redress; but, occasionally we meet also with statements made without any attempt to ascertain the facts, a sweeping condemnation of things never seen nor investigated.

In answer to such sensational blunders nothing need be said but: Examine before you judge; visit our schools before you speak about them; whatever mistakes you

actually discover and point out will be gladly corrected. But we do not wish to discuss fiction.

We have to deal with opposition of a different character, however. There are well-meaning people who assert that they do not oppose public instruction, and that they are friends of popular education and of public schools. All we object to, they say, is the extent of your course of study; we want you to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic, free to all. Let those who want higher instruction go to private schools. We believe in higher education, but the State has no right to tax all, in order to pay for the education of a few. Why should my neighbor's son study chemistry or literature at my cost?

The answer to these questions lies in this: You may dispense with some studies, such as art, or history of philosophy, or the like, without doing irreparable harm. But if you dispense with high school studies altogether, and if you prune the common school course of drawing, geography, history, composition, and the like, you do not work reform, but ruin; you strike at the roots of popular education. For, with abolishing these studies you do not abolish the demand for them. You cannot wipe out the belief of our civilization, that knowledge is the best gift which can be given to the young. You cannot ignore that many would rather lose their last penny than not to give to their child the best education that his mind can grasp. You may shut the last gate through which the aspiration of the talented, yet poor, pupil can pass to some higher aim, but you cannot even abolish these studies; when you chase them out of the common-school course, they will take refuge in private schools, for the demand for them exists. Let it be understood that by striking all higher studies from the common-school course you do not abolish them, and all you will do is to place them where they become inaccessible to the poor. Then, indeed, the common school will no longer hold its present position as the best school for all, but be the school

for those who have either not the means or the aspiration to acquire better training. At present the schools are attended by all classes of society, and wield a powerful influence in keeping together the sympathies of the citizens, whom talent, wealth, or poverty will push in diverging directions in later life. Dante says: "And we move onward unto ports diverse, through the great sea of existence, carried on by instincts placed deep in the heart of each." We do not know for what port in life the child is bound, and cannot measure the required educational cargo in accordance with it. If common-school instruction be so curtailed as to fall short of the reasonable demands of those who appreciate the value of thorough training, they will not give up the standard of education which they deem best for their children, but they will give up the common schools, and seek good education elsewhere. Such a course would lead to the caste system, under which republican institutions cannot prosper, and from which political danger cannot fail to accrue. Candor, however, requires us to admit that such a system of *poor* schools would be more economical and quite free from extravagance.

But let us ask our opponent why he wishes reading taught at all, and on what right he bases it. The answer will be that the State must give to the individuals the means of reading the laws of the State by which they are to be governed. As regards this argument, it will not go very far. For if the main object of teaching reading were to enable people to read the law of the State, I am afraid that hardly one out of a thousand makes use of the acquired ability for that purpose. If this were the sole object of instruction in reading, the great majority of people might yet remain without this knowledge, because, this plausible theory notwithstanding, they won't read the law of the State. Nor have the parents this in mind at all when they send their child to school to learn his letters. This argument, then, seems to be unreal and artificial; and the only argument which

remains is, that education by the State is required because intelligence and education are the basis of civilized institutions. This, however, speaks in favor of an extended course of learning, as well as of the elements.

It is practically conceded that the State has a right to support higher education, by the fact that it does maintain universities and polytechnic schools. Would it not be unreasonable to suppose that the State has a right to educate in the highest studies in the university, and in the primary branches, without having the right to make both ends meet by providing for instruction in grammar grades and high schools?

The State, it is true enough, should not govern too much; it should not interfere with affairs to which the individual himself may attend. Over-government, or what has been styled the paternal form of government, is as pernicious to the principle of free institutions as over-legislation. The free State should not take care of those interests in which the individual can protect himself. But, after all, the State has to protect *some* individual interests; it is formed and sustained for that purpose; for self-help in certain cases may be impossible, or may interfere with the rights of others. Now, education is one of those things of which the State may, in limited measure, take care; because the party who is chiefly concerned, namely, the child, is unable to take care of himself. Not that the responsibility for education be taken away from the family altogether, but that facilities be offered to enable every family to educate its children well. To debar a child from the privilege of an average education by clipping the common-school course, and thus placing liberal studies beyond the reach of the means of the poor family, is a wrong which the State cannot, or at least should not, commit.

Darwin tells us of the struggle for existence in the animal and vegetable kingdoms; but the struggle for existence in human society, in the life of human beings, is no less bitter



and severe. Every slight advantage of gifts or education helps man in this strife. Take the simple element of drawing, a subordinate study, and see how many walks in life, how many trades and pursuits will be unlocked to the young man or woman by a knowledge of it. There is no better help in the battle of life than a sensible education.

But what, it may be asked, has the State to do with the individual's struggle for existence? Why should it give any help to him? Does it not rather stand in the position to say to the individual, "Sink or swim. Help yourself, or perish in the battle." But the facts are otherwise; the struggle of mankind for existence does concern the State, for its victims fill poor-house and jail, prison and hospital. Hence the State, by contributing its mite to help the individual in fighting for his existence, by giving him the chance of a common-school education, uses the most rational means of keeping him from coming back to its hands.

These considerations show that the State should support a system of public schools, and that it cannot, without acting against its own interests, degrade these schools by cancelling all higher work. And there are economic as well as political interests involved. The State builds highways and regulates rivers; it promotes trade and agriculture; it seeks to increase its natural wealth; but the richest mine of national treasure is, after all, the well-trained mind of a people, its industry, and frugality, — virtues which may be promoted by education. These, indeed, are the philosopher's stone, which turns every metal into gold. If the State has a right to promote the production of national wealth, it cannot afford to neglect the richest source of all wealth, — the intelligence of the people.

What the common school has done for the country in the past is on record. Its work cannot be measured by showing the per cent of candidates failing to pass examination for West Point, as has been done by some ratiocinative genius. Since about eight per cent failed in such exam-



ination in 1840, and about forty-five per cent in 1870, he considers this proof of some radical defect in common-school training. I should think that this is not a necessary inference; there are other at least equally plausible explanations, among which the assumption that the examinations at present are more difficult than those forty years ago, suggests itself. Nor is it probable at present, when the law and commerce seem the more attractive and remunerative callings, that the young talent should rather flow into the channels of military life than into that of other callings.

What the common school has done in the past cannot be judged in that way. It is rather found in the equalizing and civilizing influence it has had on the heterogeneous elements of our population. The following is the opinion of one who, although not a school-teacher himself, speaks of the schools from long and thorough observation. Says Dr. Mayo:

“No institution in America, not excepting the Christian Church itself, more thoroughly deserved the gratitude and support of the people for its service as teacher and trainer in good morals and manners, industry, order, respect for law, honesty, piety, and the whole circle of virtues which fit the youth for honorable citizenship of the United States, than the typical common school of the present American system. Here is an institution entirely unique in its aims and methods, and positively the only agency that could attempt to instruct the youth and children together in the sovereign art of self-governing citizenship. The family is the germ of the State, but the family is isolated. Moreover, in a city (like New York) families are living in a state of prejudice against each other, separated by differences of nationality, class, culture, and a thousand disintegrating influences. It is only by bringing the children together that they can be taught to comprehend their neighbors, and learn the virtues of civic life. \* \* \* In the public schools the

children of the humble classes learn that vulgarity, ignorance, intemperance, incompetency, and servility are not good for any American citizen. The sort of honorable ambition and aspiration with which the youth become imbued in the public schools is the soul of American life."

Nor is education confined to making the child worth more for the State or society. It should make his existence dearer to himself, by making his life brighter and happier. A cultivated mind is to the individual what a bright home is to a family: a source of moral strength and intelligence, both of which can be developed by education. Intelligence, after all, is the noblest possession of man. Pascal says: "Man resembles the rose in transitory beauty; but he is a thinking rose. It needs not that the whole universe arm itself to annihilate him; a mist, a drop of water, may be sufficient to make him perish. But when nature destroys him, he remains superior to her; for he knows that he dies, but nature does not know that she kills. All our worth and dignity lie in thought; it lifts us above time and space."

The common-school system will, as we hope and expect, outlast the present troubles; but it may learn many a good lesson in the school of adversity. The keen criticisms of the day, unjust as they frequently are, may become more useful than injudicious praise; and while all the friends of education will defend the schools against ruin, they will lend their hand to reasonable reform.

To teach our boys and girls higher aspirations in life is well enough, but it is much more important to impress upon them that their duty lies in doing faithfully the familiar task immediately before them, without looking at material reward or promotion, which the future may bring. To prepare for a life of dutiful activity in the humble sphere in which the majority of beings are likely to move is a more important aim than to raise aspirations which may unnerve for lowlier work, and make it distasteful.

The course of study should be kept adapted to the life

and wants of the community, so that the value of school training may be brought home to them. A poor school in this respect may be defined as one in which the children are taught what grown people don't care to know. Studies like penmanship, drawing, reading, and composition are not only of value in themselves, as means of culture, but they are also the most tangible tests by which the community can ascertain and learn to appreciate the value of school training. The discussion of what is to be taught to children is two thousand years old. Agesilaus answered the question, "What shall children learn?" by saying, "Whatever they shall do when grown."

The course of study is, in its principal features, the same in the common schools of most of the larger cities. It will be interesting, therefore, to notice the radical deviation from the general course which has of late taken place in the schools of Boston. A leading educational magazine says in regard to it:

"To show what a departure it is from the beaten paths of the past, we present the main features of this new course of studies. In the primary schools the instruction is almost entirely oral. Scholars are to learn from objects and from the teacher, instead of from the book. Oral lessons will be given upon pictures, plants, animals, or whatever the ingenuity of the teacher may suggest, in order to accustom the scholars to express what they know in words. This exercise will be called 'Language.' Other oral instructions will be given upon form, color, measure; animals grouped by habits, traits, or structures; vegetables, minerals, the human body, and hygiene. Fables, anecdotes, and simple poetry will receive proper attention. The metric system will be taught from the metric apparatus. Heretofore much time has been given to spelling, and many hours spent over the primary speller; that book is to be entirely discarded, and 'some easy, common words from the reading lessons' substituted in its place. Two new studies are introduced called, 'Recreation' and 'Miscel-

laneous,' to which an hour and a-half a week is to be given. Whether this means work or play, teachers and scholars are yet to learn.

“In the grammar grade, equally important changes are indicated. Grammar is abolished,—at least the name,—and the spelling-book goes with it. How the eyes of the boys will glisten when they learn this fact! But we question, in fact, the wisdom of these ultra measures. ‘Language’ takes the place of grammar, which means less of technical grammar, such as parsing, etc., and more attention given to composition, structure of sentences, use of capitals, letter-writing, and analysis. Spelling is to be from the reader, and other text-books. The amount of writing in copy-books is reduced more than one-half, and more writing in blank-books and in other exercises required. The great amount of time previously devoted to geography is reduced, and natural philosophy and physiology are to be taken up in the third class. Music and drawing receive the same attention as during previous years. The most important change here, as in the primary grade, is in reference to oral instruction. It is not to be as in the old programme, merely mentioned and rarely attended to by the teachers, for want of time, but a specified amount of time per week is to be allotted to it, as well as to arithmetic or reading. In the two lowest classes the instructions will be almost entirely oral. In the fourth class it will be largely so, and in the other classes from one to two hours per week will be given to this exercise. In the lower classes, the subjects for oral instruction will be natural history, plants from May to November, animals from November to May, trades, occupations, common phenomena, stories, anecdotes, mythology, metals, and minerals. In the upper classes, physiology, life in the Middle Ages, biographical and historical sketches, and experiments in physics. Every study has its specified time assigned to it in the course.”

These and similar changes in other places are indications





of the changed demands of our times on teachers and schools.

They ask for less routine work, and freer intercourse between teacher and pupils. They ask for less abstract and more concrete teaching. They demand that the teacher should rely less on home study, and more on drill and conversation in the school-room. Facts form the substance of all knowledge. Without an abundant supply of them the mind remains a void, for our mental organization grows out of the perceptions formed; these, again, are the result of the facts presented to the senses of the learner. Nor is memory-culture to be discarded, for it is the chief process by which the mind is built up in younger age. So the teacher cannot listen to the foolish demands not to teach facts, and not to train the memory. Knowledge is not what we hear, but what we remember, says Dante. To confine school instruction to a kind of mental gymnastics is as objectionable as one-sided memory-training. Napoleon the First used to remark that a head without memory was like a fortress without garrison. On the other hand, the number of facts should be reduced. The child's mind, Plato observes, is like a jug with a narrow mouth: if you wish to fill it, pour in a little at a time.

Let the teacher remember that, not what is recited, but what is learned and lastingly acquired, is of value. To let the pupil help himself may be very convenient, but to show him how to help himself is better. Life is too short to allow the pupil to waste time and to lose self-confidence in the attempt to help himself, when the task is evidently beyond his power. Let the teacher remember that example is more powerful than precept, that illustration teaches better than description. Experience is the fountain-head of all science.

"The fault of most of the disciplines proposed in education," says Matthew Arnold, "is that they are by far too ambitious. Our improvers in education are almost always for



proceeding by way of argumentation and complication. Reduction and simplification, I say, is what is rather required. We give the learner too much to do, and we are overzealous to tell him what he ought to think. Judgment is forced upon us by experience. The aim and end of education through letters is to get this experience. The discipline, therefore, which puts us in the way of getting it cannot be called an inconsiderable one."

These and hundreds of other improvements suggest themselves in every recitation. They show how much can be done by the work of every thinking teacher to enlist the sympathies of the public and to gain friends for the cause of public education. The school-room is the place for reform without ruin.

Nature and education form man. Nature has done her work, and family and teacher must do theirs. Education, as a calling, is beset with as many troubles as any other business in life; but it is not without its charms. The teacher may feel conscious of working in a cause towards which the interest of all civilization points; for education is the first awakening of the soul of the child; and school-days are the cherished recollection of old age. That his son is well educated, and can rise in life, is the comfort of the dying hour of the father. Education fights the battle of truth, love, and light against darkness, hatred, and crime. It is the hope of the patriot. It is wealth, without being a burden. It is the ideal temple which the human race has reared; it knows of no invidious distinction of nationality, race, or creed,—all enter in brotherly harmony. The rich and poor it benefits alike. It is the charm of prosperity, a comfort in sorrow. The cause of education is the symbol which gives to all mankind, to future and present, the promise of happiness and peace.

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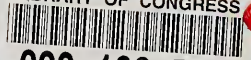


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